

VZCZCXRO2054
PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHRN #0004/01 0191642
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 191642Z JAN 10
FM USMISSION UN ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1251
INFO RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RUEHC/USAID WASHDC
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0450
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0290
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0020
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0513
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 1328

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 UN ROME 000004

SENSITIVE
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MEXICO CITY FOR AG/ECON/SCIENCE OFFICES, FBI FOR HENSLE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FAO DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL BRIEFS ON PRIORITY AREAS

¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified. Not for dissemination outside the USG.

Summary

¶2. (SBU) The Deputy Director General (DDG) of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Jim Butler, told the DCM on January 13 that U.S. leadership on global food security had set an extremely positive tone with FAO senior staff and other FAO Members. He was very pleased with his own late-December meetings in Washington and noted that Director General Diouf would visit Washington in mid-March. Butler confirmed that he would continue to exercise overall responsibility for FAO's reform plan with the establishment of a second DDG for Operations and welcomed Mission's strong commitment to ensuring the plan's complete implementation. Butler also welcomed Mission's efforts to promote gender equality within the FAO and ensure greater American citizen employment. However, Butler is frustrated over attempts to organize separate conferences on biotechnology and "agro-terrorism," and sought Mission help to ensure their success. Butler is currently ruminating over plans for his own departure from FAO, and Mission believes explicit encouragement for him to serve out his contract (through CY 2010) is in order. End summary.

Washington Meetings

¶3. (SBU) During a January 13 meeting with the DCM and Poloff, FAO Deputy DG (DDG) Jim Butler characterized his late-December meetings in Washington as exceptionally positive and productive. He ascribed the new atmosphere at FAO and among member states to strong U.S. leadership in reaching agreement in November on FAO's budget for the coming biennium, and, more broadly, to U.S. leadership in promoting global food security. Butler clearly understands from his meetings with State/IO that USG support for the increased 2010-11 budget should not be interpreted as a change in U.S. policy regarding strict budget discipline for UN agencies.

Diouf to Washington

¶4. (SBU) Diouf has asked Butler to return to Washington in late January or February to lay the groundwork for the DG's March 22-24 visit. Butler will seek Mission help to secure appropriately senior meetings at State, USAID, Agriculture and the White House. Diouf also intends to visit with Congressional leaders, including members of the Black Caucus and the Hunger Caucus. Butler pledged to remain in touch as details of the DG's travel plans emerge.

FAO Reforms, IPA, UNTAI

¶5. (SBU) The DCM raised FAO reform, emphasizing that the USG would carefully scrutinize the progress made by FAO in implementation of its reform plan, the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA), which is fully funded from the regular budget in the current biennium. Butler replied that he would continue to exercise overall oversight of the IPA reform portfolio, but noted that many of the crucial reform areas, including human resources, would be under the purview of new DDG for

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Operations, He Chang Shui, who starts work this month. Butler characterized Mr. He as a "consummate professional" who is personally committed to the reform process. FAO staff, he said, were working on an internal document tallying progress on implementation of 14 key reform projects under the IPA and offered to share the report, once completed, with the Mission. Stressing the urgency and importance of meaningful FAO reform, the DCM highlighted the USG's UN Transparency and Accountability Report, and recalled the eight key areas where the Mission would direct particular attention in coming months (Comment: Septel discusses in detail the status of FAO/UNTAI issues and Mission's efforts to promote improved results. End Comment).

Hiring American Citizens, More Women

¶6. (SBU) The DCM told Butler that the Mission would continue to insist that FAO hire qualified American citizens as Americans continue to be under-represented in the organization, and would also press FAO to hire more women of all nationalities to senior professional ranks, as FAO's performance in that area was noticeably weak. Butler welcomed the initiatives and encouraged the USG to press these issues in future meetings throughout the organization. On hiring Americans, Butler said an "anti-American" bias among some senior staff serving the Director General may be partly responsible for the situation and encouraged the Mission to continue to strongly advocate for qualified American candidates, early in the hiring process and especially for more senior positions.

Biotech Conference

¶7. (SBU) Butler noted that planning for a March "bio-technology" conference in Mexico was proceeding slowly, and was a source of personal "frustration," as support from all quarters was not forthcoming. Butler said he would press for Mexico to be more proactive in encouraging participation. FAO staff, he said, would brief Member representatives "next week" on conference planning efforts. While noting the delicate "political balance" associated with the substance of the conference, Butler welcomed additional U.S. efforts to ensure a successful conference, including demarches in capitals to encourage strong support and attendance.

Ag Terror Conference

¶8. (SBU) Butler said that the FBI was pressing FAO to organize a conference on "bio-terrorism" to highlight issues where member states can tighten controls on chemicals and biological agents. He encouraged his FBI interlocutors to work through USUN Rome on next steps, and Mission will follow up. The Director General, however, had cautioned Butler to step back from Conference planning, lest his interest/nationality be too closely identified with support for U.S. government policy. Butler said he agreed and had established a working group within FAO to organize the conference.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Butler was in very good spirits, but is not certain at this point how much longer he will remain in his current

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position. His contract runs through the end of 2010, and he said he would be happy to serve out that contract - if the USG desired. However, he has some other options available and may leave earlier. If he were to leave before the end of the year, he believes the DG would not replace him but rather have someone serve in his position on an acting basis until the next DG appoints new senior leadership after his/her election in June ¶2011. Mission believes Butler should be encouraged to serve out his full contract through CY 2010.

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